

Shropshire Botanical Society

Newsletter

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Past copies of the newsletter are available as pdfs
from the Shropshire Botanical Society website:

<http://www.shropshirebotany.org.uk>

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Front Cover:

Atropa belladonna Deadly Nightshade, Stevenshill.
(Dan Wrench 2022.)



Our thanks to the Shropshire Wildlife Trust and the Field
Studies Council for their generous support of our society.
Both organisations support the work of the society in
recognition of the importance of the contribution we
make to understanding Shropshire botany.



The big change for botanical recording this year has been the change of our vice-county recorders for Shropshire, with Mags Cousins and John Martin now jointly covering the role. We wholeheartedly thank Sarah Whild and Alex Lockton for their excellent work in this capacity, including checking our records, maintaining the data and providing training. You can read more about botanical recording in Shropshire, past and present, in this copy of the newsletter.

Winter meeting

We have John Warren booked for our winter meeting which is to be held on 21st January at FSC Preston Montford. John has just written a new flora of difficult to identify plant groups called *“Frustrating Flowers and Puzzling Plants”*. John will be taking a look at some of these plant groups in his talk and discussing different approaches for identifying them. His flora will hopefully be available to buy early next year.

Spring meeting

Mark Duffell has also agreed to do a talk at our spring meeting on 22nd April at FSC Preston Montford. The talk is titled *“Does Shropshire have a problem with Invasive Non-native Species? A review of botanical data for the county”*.

Database

We're very proud to have our new online database up and running this year. It is an excellent resource for searching plant records in Shropshire; you can search for records at a given site name or grid square, or look at the records for a given species. The data search is quick and easy to use, and you can see the records displayed on a map. We encourage you to give it a try if you have not already done so! The website address is: <https://flora.shropshirebotany.org.uk/>

Plants, People, Places and Publication

A look back at aspects of development of the Shropshire Botanical Society

Sue Dancey

Like all good things, our small society started through a vision and a perceived need to document the plants in our large and varied county. Charles Sinker convened an initial Flora Project back in 1975 growing out of his involvement with Shropshire Conservation Trust, which started in 1962 and later became the Shropshire Wildlife Trust. Charles was then the Director of FSC Preston Montford, where the headquarters of the Field Studies Council became located. He was a recognised natural historian with particular skills in botany. His accounts of the Shropshire Flora, particularly the development of our meres and mosses are a joy to read. I recommend you have a look at this free download from 1962. <https://fsj.field-studies-council.org/browse-by-field-centre/preston-montford.aspx>.

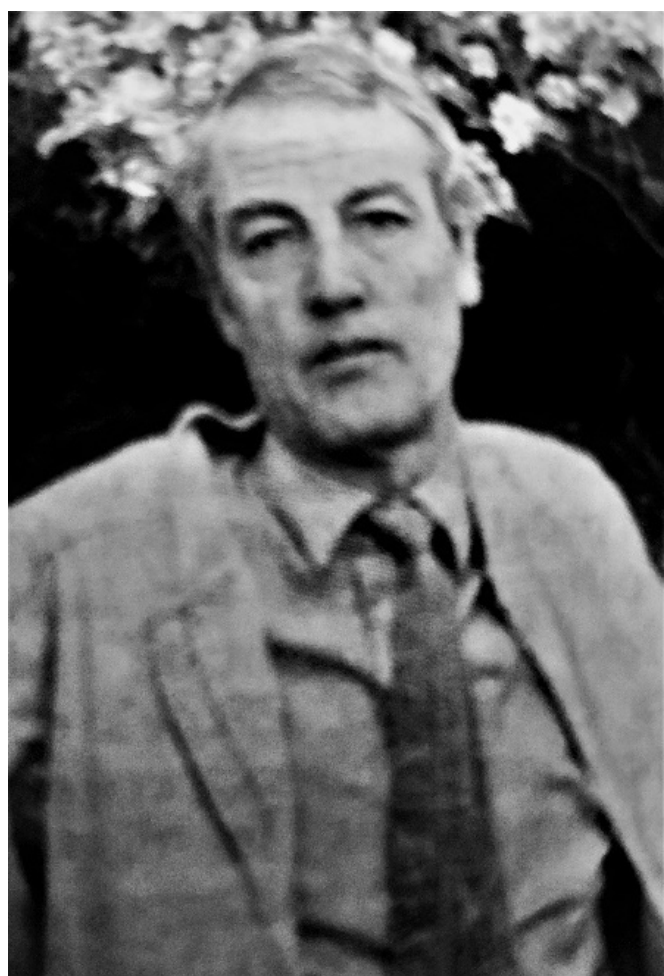


Fig 1. Charles Sinker (Field Studies Council)

[preston-montford.aspx](https://fsj.field-studies-council.org/browse-by-field-centre/preston-montford.aspx). In a Shropshire Botanical Society newsletter in 2003, Mary Hignett explains that in Shropshire and the borderlands, many clubs formed to visit and study sites of natural history and archaeological interest. These included the Naturalists Field Club and Archaeology Society, the Caradoc and Severn Valley Field Club and the Oswestry Institute. Indeed, I attended a wonderful anniversary event for the Montgomery Field Society this September. Botany was a part of all of these and its own society, the Flora Group, came together inevitably to explore our rich county.

Charles Sinker's leadership of the Flora Group led to the writing of the Ecological Flora of the Shropshire Region along with the other authors John Packham, Ian Trueman, Philip Oswald, Franklyn Perring and Will Prestwood. This was furnished with accurate records collected by volunteers across the county and collated on record cards. These were housed at Preston Montford, and although the materials were largely relocated to the Shropshire Wildlife Trust in the 1980s, I could still find the odd card lodged in the welly store in the cellar when I started my role as Warden in 1994. These record cards, collated with the skill of a collaborative of authors, led to the first ever ecological flora. I realised at the time that being led by such great botanists might have influenced the design of the first Shropshire Conservation Trust logo which was the rare *Nuphar pumila* Least Water-lily. Shropshire was fortunate in the network of botanists that Sinker drew together. John Packham was the executive editor for the project and both he and Ian Trueman were already well-known academic botanists working at the then polytechnic at Wolverhampton. Ian was then the BSBI Recorder for our county and had links with Franklin Perring who was both the General Secretary for the Wildlife Trusts, Head of the Biological Records Centre and a botanist with an eye for getting things done. These stalwarts were joined by Philip Oswald who worked for the

Nature Conservancy Council and Will Prestwood who was an employee of the Trust and the Research assistant for the project. I note that there was only one person who had some of his time 'officially' dedicated to researching the information and records for this publication; the others had other full time roles in education and natural history which melded seamlessly into the research and authorship needed for completion - a pattern that seems to have been repeated ever since across so many good initiatives.

In 1984, David J. Bellamy wrote of this book "It is an important work of scholarship - geology, botany, geography, ecology and history all in one - a Domesday Book for Shropshire against which all future change will be measured."

Over the following ten years, works continued to research and update the flora. The Project continued using the Leighton Fund housed at the Wildlife Trust, and in 1991 a new updated edition was published with a preface that included the phrase from Charles Sinker "[the authors] hope that early in the 21st century there will be a third Shropshire Flora based on the new 'time-slice.'" Ian Trueman continued as the BSBI County Recorder

and the group continued to update records and seek to increase the botanical knowledge of the county. There were other projects developing, including that housed at the neighbouring Montgomery Field Society who liaised closely with the Flora Group in Shropshire, and many volunteers surveyed for projects by both groups. At this time, Ian also became Chair of the Flora Group.

The Flora Group ran from 1994 to 1999 when it became formally constituted and renamed as The Shropshire Botanical Society (SBS) 23 years ago. This is its current format and it continued the coordination of the voluntary group of amateur and professional botanists grouped together to research the distribution and ecology of the plants and vegetation of our county. The intention was to publish findings in books and atlases. The SBS had at this time over 50 members and had 10km coordinators - 23 of them to record across this large county. This included such botanical stars as Ruth Dawes, Pat Parker, Rob Stokes and John Clayfield who remain active members today and would not have started without Sarah Whild who drew together the whole group and was the lead figure in creating the successful society we have today. I have fond memories of meeting and learning from Chris Walker who maintained the Conservancy connection and brought so much else to the group; like many of the fab botanists now sadly deceased, we miss him. I would love to hear from any of our members who were involved in these projects and can add anything to my brief account here. It is my intention to add to this article and produce a summary that can be shared more widely, and so I would be grateful for any anecdotes, pictures and corrections.

A binding activity in our society has always been the field excursions. These may have had a strict recording function such as 'square bashing' or hunting to update an old record, or potentially just for the simple joy of being at a lovely site with likeminded botanists. In the past we have had some great leaders, including many of those mentioned already that were, and in some cases still are, so capable of enthusing us through mire and fen and up steep inclines and deep valleys to search for Shropshire's botanical gems. Some field trips had a specific 'training element' and all had, and still have, the social and informal educational outcomes that make a society like ours more than

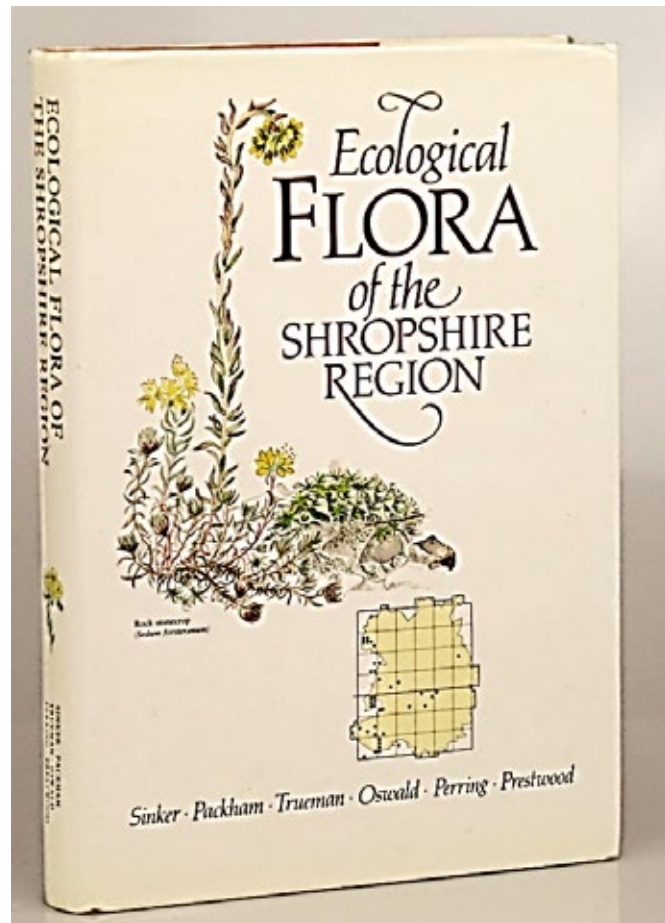


Fig 2. Cover of the first flora.



Fig 3. Ian Trueman photograph from BSBI archive ©Ian Trueman.

the sum of its parts. This is where our wonderful committee has played to its strengths - with a natural group of field leaders who often called on others to develop a programme of trips each year to suit all tastes. These events started in Sinker's early leadership and have continued to the present day, with Sarah initially taking the lion's share of events, with many training opportunities to support SBS members learning their plants and developing confidence in botanical recording.

The first SBS newsletter was produced with keen eyed botanists in mind. First records, e.g. *Setaria pumila* Yellow Bristle-grass SJ41, Rob Stokes (1994) and amendments to the red data list, e.g. listing the 5 county sites for *Alisma lanceolatum* Narrow-leaved Water-Plantain, are among those reported.

Have a look at the first newsletter which is digitised and available alongside all the newsletters via this link <https://issuu.com/shropshirebotany>

This society first shows Fred Rumsey's images of Polypody ferns collected at Grinshill. Somehow, Shropshire Botanists always knew how to connect with the big names in botany. Clive Jermy was a world leader in ferns, and Fred Rumsey also a world

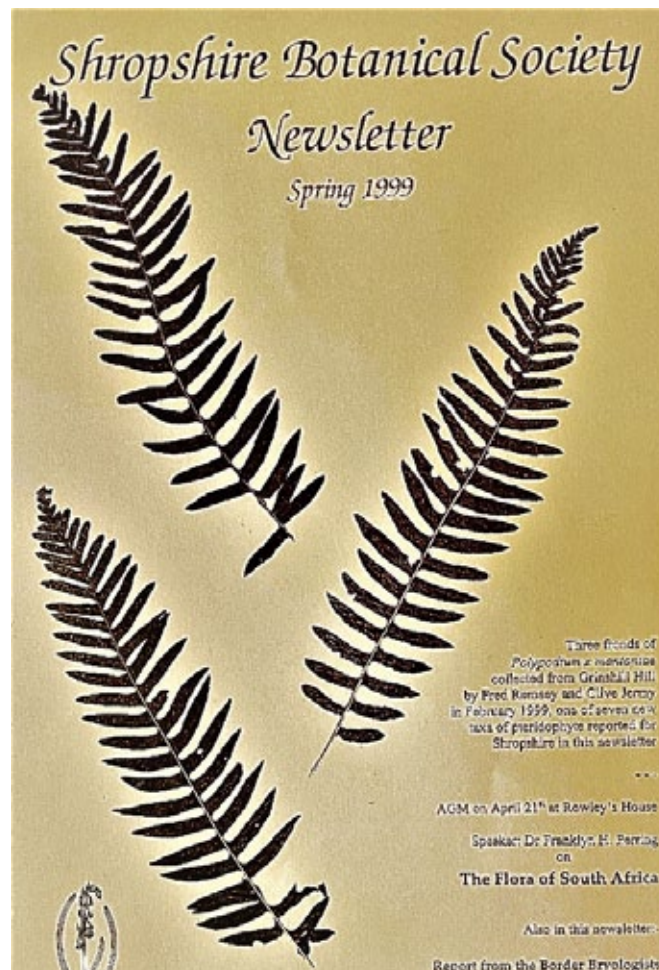


Fig 4. Cover of the first Shropshire Botanical Society newsletter.

renowned botanist, were kind enough to share their expertise with us folks from the shires. We have Sarah to thank for continuing and broadening these contacts and maintaining Shropshire's place on the botanical map as she stepped into becoming the VC recorder for our county.

Sarah was assisted in running the Society by Alex Lockton who became employed by the BSBI to coordinate the activities of county recorders at a nationwide level. Alex turned out to be innovative in collating the growing collection of botanical records. Sarah connected with leaders in plant taxonomy including Tim Rich, Clive Stace and Mark Spencer - all of whom have willingly given their time and kept us all so well informed. Alex Lockton also edited and produced the first newsletters. He and Sarah made a great team reaching out throughout the county to train, inform and motivate, and Sarah, as our first Chair, guided the committee of eager botanists keen to make a difference in our county.

Sarah was also the leader for an academic Biological Recording programme, which was



Fig 5. Sarah Whild at Brown Moss © Sue Dancey.

administered from offices within the Gateway in Shrewsbury. The programme was to address a growing gap in the provision of biological recording education, and led to a partnership between the University of Birmingham (later transferring to Manchester Metropolitan University), the Field Studies Council and the BSBI. She did all this while leading the botanical society as Chair, enabling us to collaborate with the Universities, engage with academia and recruit a growing number of students to our membership, some of whom remain with us to this day.

Mark Duffell of Arvensis Ecology and a former committee member of our society said this when she retired from her paid role: *"Sarah has the ability to enthuse students on the importance of biological recording and how these observations can have a positive impact on the natural environment. Her natural talent as a scientist, teacher and artist all came to the fore in her days out in the field and in the classroom. I have many happy memories of being taught by Sarah whether that was drenched in Benthall Edge wood in Ironbridge looking at Ferns or botanising along the River Severn in Shrewsbury on a warm sunny evening."*



Fig 6. Mark Duffell (right) and Alex Lockton using a grapnel © Sue Dancey.

We are very lucky to keep her support and friendship in her unpaid role as former VC recorder, former Chair and inspiration for our group. She remains a corresponding member of the committee and a vital source of information.

Sarah also devised and launched the Field Identification Skills Certificate (FISC) over 10 years ago which has now become the industry standard for assessing botanical survey skills. She and I are currently working together to transfer this certificate to the BSBI in perpetuity. We also tested this concept on some of the Botanical Society membership during its development!

Alex, meanwhile, continued the never ending job of managing our recording data and alongside others roles took on the production of our newsletter and many of the maps and graphics included in our floras and referenced in the next paragraphs.

With Sarah at the helm, our group took on some innovative projects, which resulted in the publication of a series of Floras. Once again - Sarah and Alex led the way in their production and development. These were of sites of county interest and all these works are available on our website. Visit <https://www.shropshirebotany.org.uk> where links to the following titles and more can be found.

Whild, SJ, Godfrey, M and Lockton A (2011) **A Flora of Shrewsbury.**

An annotated checklist of the vascular plants, bryophytes and charophytes of the town of Shrewsbury, based on fieldwork conducted by the University of Birmingham School of Biosciences with the Shropshire Botanical Society, in 2010.

Duffell, M (2010) **A Flora of Loton Deer Park.**

An annotated checklist of the vascular plants of a private estate with public access on the Shropshire/Wales border, based on fieldwork conducted by the FSC Biodiversity Training Project with the Shropshire Botanical Society.

Whild, SJ, and Lockton A (2011) **The Flora of the Stiperstones 2009.**

An annotated checklist of the vascular plants of the Stiperstones based on fieldwork conducted by the University of Birmingham School of Biosciences with the Shropshire Botanical Society.

Whild, SJ, Godfrey, M and Lockton A (2006) **Flora**

of Haughmond Hill 2006.

A project by the Shropshire Botanical Society to survey the whole hill and establish a baseline for future monitoring.

Whild, SJ, and Lockton A (2005) **New Flora of Attingham Park.**

This was a repeat of F. Perring's Flora of 1975, following his rationale to record only wild plants and those that are commonly found growing in the wild, for documenting the natural flora of the park. It was a joint project with the University of Birmingham School of Biosciences and the Field Studies Council.

Whild, SJ, and Lockton A (2005) **Rare Plants of Shropshire.**

This county rare plants register, now in its third edition, was first published by the Shropshire Museum Service and subsequently by ourselves for the second and third editions. It summarises the endemic, internationally, nationally and locally rare species along with nationally and locally scarce plants.

The latter book was particularly interesting to me when studying the Shropshire Flora and the species of particular rarity. It includes the rare *Nuphar pumila* Least Water-lily, a subject of a Natural England research project in 2017 which was written up by Mags Cousins in the autumn of that year. I often found some species for my first time (e.g. *Cicuta virosa* Cowbane and *Cladium mariscus* Great Fen-sedge) through consulting this lovely little book whilst teaching. It is ahead of its time in hinting at the concepts of axiophytes as it uses coincidence mapping and habitat and indicator species to explore the concepts of conservation at site level.

This leads me to the pièce de résistance of our Society; the publication of a 21st century Shropshire flora led by Alex and Sarah in 2015. **The Flora and Vegetation of Shropshire** is a large format, colour printed exploration of our sites and plants and it fulfilled Sinkers wish that a third flora would be produced using a new 'time slice'. This book does indeed update the doomsday book to which Bellamy referred. This atlas builds on the ecological knowledge of the Sinker Flora and adds updated biogeographical information and an inclusive overview of each species. Published on an innovative print on demand system using a

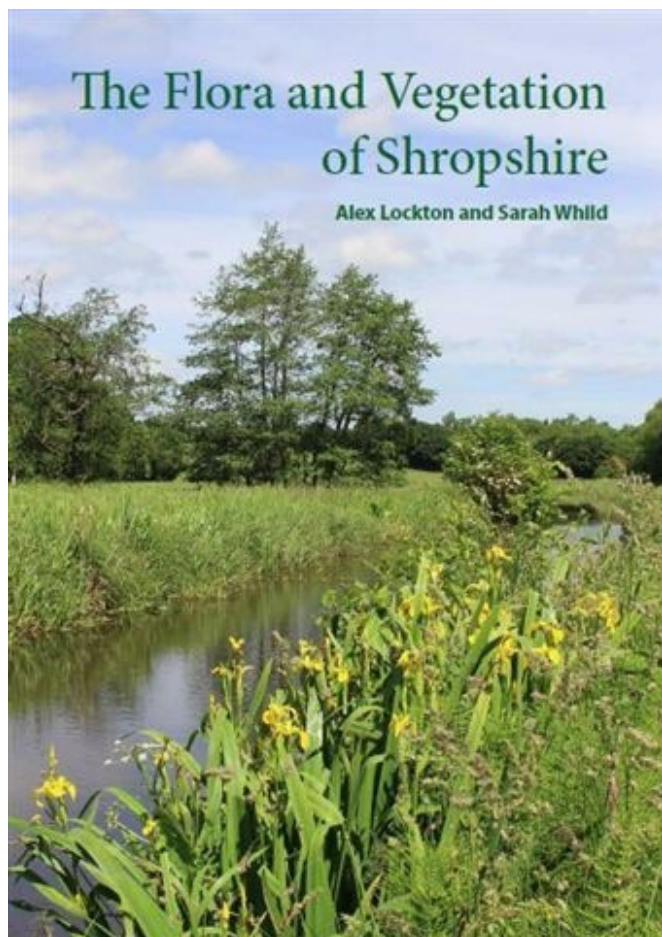


Fig 7. New Flora front cover © Sue Dancey.

local printer, and uploaded onto our website some years later for open access, it enables more and more of us to be able to access the collation of the

painstaking work of the authors. It was funded by Shropshire Wildlife Trust, the Jean Jackson Trust, Field Studies Council, Shropshire Ecological Data Network (SEDN) and the BSBI.

There are some depressing facts showing the decline of many species over a short period, and the trends are analysed in a chapter by Ian Trueman. Citing some key examples e.g. *Cruciata laevipes* Crosswort, we are informed of the threats to our county from eutrophication and development. Forestry, drainage, mere and scrub management are considered on an evidence-based approach when examining the trends of key species. All those who helped through discussing the issues, submitting their records and attending the launch of this text should be proud. This is a great output from our small society. It remains current and available – now through Summerfield books who have taken on the print on demand responsibilities. The updates are published on our website in electronic form and the original is available as a free download.

Apart from the flora itself, we have generated relationships with national recording schemes such as the BSBI and the Threatened Plants Database (TPDB). At its heart, the TPDB is a database about the 400 rarest species in Britain. It was set up to enable the Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Botanical Records Species Sites Squares About

Species in Shrawardine

☒ scientific name
☐ common name only
☐ axiophytes only

☐ only plants
☐ only bryophytes
☒ both plants and bryophytes

Download this data

Family	Scientific Name	Common Name	Count	Records
Sapindaceae	<i>Acer campestre</i>	Field Maple	2	see records
Sapindaceae	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	Sycamore	3	see records
Asteraceae	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Yarrow	3	see records
Apiaceae	<i>Aegopodium podagraria</i>	Ground-elder	1	see records
Apiaceae	<i>Aethusa cynapium</i>	Fool's Parsley	2	see records
Poaceae	<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>	Common Bent	2	see records

The map on the right shows the county of Shropshire with a blue pin indicating the location of Shrawardine near Shrewsbury. Surrounding towns like Wrexham, Stoke-on-Trent, Stafford, Cannock, Wolverhampton, and Birmingham are also visible.

Fig 8. Website screenshot from our own database.

to fulfil its statutory duties in protecting these plants and advising the UK government on conservation issues. Our data was funnelled into this through Alex and Sarah. We also started to submit data to our emerging county recording scheme SEDN and allow our data to be accessible via the National Biodiversity Network (NBN), and later the NBN Atlas.

The digital age has been embraced, and as members will know, partly through the restrictions of COVID but also through the need for sharing current information, new technologies have helped us keep in touch with our membership. Our latest three chairs (Mags Cousins, John Handley and Dan Wrench) have led us through the development of our very own database which can be managed by more of us and enables anyone to have instant access to botanical records in Shropshire.

Making records available and the production of floras and newsletters has been great to reach out to both members and newcomers alike. Meetings in the field have been wonderful for enabling further communication, but our indoor meetings are also key to our continued success. We arrange to meet as a society twice a year at indoor meetings in winter and mid-season, including the AGM. This even continued in the COVID years (via Zoom) where our then chair, the marvellous Mags,

also kept us together through a brilliant newsletter and email feed. Our meetings are traditionally held at Preston Montford now where we host members plus invited guests. Past speakers have included the humorous overviews from Mark Spencer, a local focus on work on the Montgomery canal by Jonathan Briggs, and the international challenges of orchid taxonomy from Richard Bateman to name but a few. We are privileged to have members, notably Ruth Dawes and Sue Swindels, organise cakes, quizzes, book sales, raffles and even cookery competitions using plant families identified in the ingredients.

Of course it is the PEOPLE that join that make this a vibrant society that continues moving forward. This is all of you reading this. There are over 100 members - many of whom sign up three years at a time and some of whom are from out of county supporting us from afar. There have been many people who have supported us through the years and I hesitate to try and name them as I might cause offence by omission. We all play our part and PLEASE get in touch if you would like to join the committee, offer a talk or contribute an article.

Thanks to all of us who have made it happen so well for so long.

Shropshire Botanical Society

Promoting the enjoyment, understanding and conservation of the flora of Shropshire.



Plant Recording in VC40

Mags Cousins and John Martin joint County Recorders

I am happy to report that John and I have survived our first summer as the new BSBI County Recorders for VC40, Shropshire! We took over the sterling work of Sarah Whild and Alex Lockton in May 2022, not without some fear and trepidation but we were encouraged by support from Sarah with identification, and by the fact that Alex is still maintaining a copy of the plant records for the Shropshire Ecological Data Network (SEDN).

Over the summer we have settled on a recording system which provides the most secure data management, and efficient way for us to process your records, namely iRecord. iRecord was set up, and is maintained by, the Biological Records Centre (BRC) as part of their work for the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH), so we are very lucky that this system is available completely free of charge to the whole recording community.

Any record starts with seeing the plant and as botanists we all have our favourite methods of making records and notes in the field. We have no wish to interfere with the habitats of botanists! Indeed, I remain envious of those who make this first step look so effortless, with a quick scribble in a pocket notebook with a well-thumbed Stace or Poland to hand, or conversely whipping out their phone, tap and record made.

We are all familiar with the four essentials of a biological record “What, Where, Who and When” but I can add “Then What”, and “Where Next”?! Regardless of how the plant records were captured in the field, these records need to make their way to some sort of repository to be useful, such as the county or national recording schemes. Sounds simple but it certainly isn't, mainly because the recording scene now involves such a vast array of online tools as well as the old style recording sheets, spreadsheets etc. Also there is more awareness and there are more people making records. It is inevitable and inescapable that records contain inaccuracies and errors creep in, and not just with the species, but all sorts of other niggles. Our main task as County Recorders is to receive and confirm incoming plant records for VC40 and to ensure that the records are made available to SEDN, NBN Atlas

and BSBI, clean, validated and traceable.

Luckily iRecord is both a system for individuals and groups to capture or input records and crucially for John and myself, is a means of data cleaning and managing the plant data. Provided your plant records have made it onto iRecord we can view each record, see your photos of the plant and your comments, respond to you directly and ultimately verify your record/s, all through iRecord, and hopefully in a timely manner. We are encouraging everyone to use iRecord to input their own records. Like any system, the more you use it, the more familiar and easier it gets. It is quite fun to see your own records on there and feel part of the wider recording community, and believe me, for John and myself it eliminates a whole lot of other pain, too boring to talk about here!

Using iRecord, you can input single records, even using an app in the field, or later on when back home you can import a spreadsheet of records, a .csv file from MapMate, or simply input a list of records from your notebook. iRecord even receives records from iNaturalist for us to verify for VC40. iRecord is really very versatile and yet with a solid and robust database underpinning it that is maintained for free by the experts at BRC. Every record receives a unique identifier so will never be lost and every change made to it is tracked and recorded. You may have noticed I am a huge fan of iRecord and it is now our go to method for your County Recorders to receive and verify your plant records!

Well done and huge thanks, to all of you who have embraced iRecord and use it to submit records. Some of you had a little help and guidance from me, especially in importing spreadsheets and I intend to run some online training this autumn. Email mags@bagbatch.co.uk if you would like to join one of the following sessions:

Using iRecord to submit plant records for Shropshire, VC40, online training by Mags Cousins

Sat. 12th Nov. 14.00hrs

Sun. 27th Nov. 14.00hrs

A survey of Spring Coppice at Lyth Hill

John Handley

During the spring of 2022 I had an opportunity to survey Spring Coppice, a four-hectare woodland that is part of the Lyth Hill Local Nature Reserve. The survey raised several questions, although the focus of this article is on the lack of natural oak regeneration within the woodland.

The objective of a woodland survey is to identify which species are present, where they occur, how large their populations are, which communities they form together and what factors are affecting the site (Peterken, 1993). Such observations relate to the moment when they are made, but they are often designed also as a baseline for measuring how fast and in what direction the observed features are changing.

The majority of the Spring Coppice woodland is W10 *Quercus robur*-*Pteridium aquilinum*-*Rubus fruticosus* woodland (Rodwell, 1991). *Quercus*

petraea Sessile Oak dominates the canopy, although both *Q. petraea* and *Q. robur* Pedunculate Oak were both recorded, along with the hybrid *Q. × rosacea*. In truth all the Oaks would have contained genes from both parents and could be described as the hybrid; they were split dependent upon the dominant features.

The shrub layer contains frequent *Sorbus aucuparia* Rowan and *Prunus avium* Wild Cherry, with *S. aucuparia* occasionally contributing to the canopy. *Crataegus monogyna* Hawthorn, *Taxus baccata* Yew and *Acer pseudoplatanus* Sycamore are occasional, with *A. pseudoplatanus* becoming more abundant in the northwest of the woodland, having a greater affiliation for the W7 *Alnus glutinosa*-*Fraxinus excelsior*-*Lysimachia nemorum* community. *Lonicera periclymenum* Honeysuckle occurs frequently creating swathes of growth within the



Figure 1. Typical *Quercus robur*-*Pteridium aquilinum*-*Rubus fruticosus* ground flora with Bluebells emerging through the Bramble, alongside Greater Stitchwort.

shrub layer whilst *Malus sylvestris* Crab Apple occurs rarely throughout the woodland.

The Oak allows sufficient light through the canopy to enable *Pteridium aquilinum* Bracken and *Rubus fruticosus* agg. Bramble to compete for dominance at ground level, permitting *Dryopteris filix-mas* Male-fern and *D. dilatata* Broad Buckler-fern to occur occasionally where their authority weakens. *Milium effusum* Wood Millet finds frequent holes through the Bramble and *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* Bluebells and *Stellaria holostea* Greater Stitchwort flower and seed before the Bramble supersedes. *Poa trivialis* Rough-stalked Meadow-grass is constant at low levels, and where there is more acidity *Holcus mollis* Creeping Soft-grass becomes more prevalent.

There are some small areas of woodland, sitting on thinner soil, giving rise to W16 *Quercus* spp.-*Betula* spp.-*Deschampsia flexuosa* woodland (Rodwell, 1991). Here *Deschampsia flexuosa* Wavy Hair-grass and *Agrostis capillaris* Common Bent replace *Holcus mollis*, whilst other graminoids – *Luzula multiflora* Heath Wood-rush and *L. pilosa* Hairy Wood-rush and forbs such as *Teucrium*

scorodonia Wood Sage, *Ceratocarpus claviculata* Climbing Corydalis and *Galium saxatile* Heath Bedstraw pick out these areas.

There is also a section of W7 *Alnus glutinosa*-*Fraxinus excelsior*-*Lysimachia nemorum* woodland (Rodwell, 1991) closely associated with the spring along the north-western edge that lends its name to this woodland. The presence of *Alnus glutinosa* Alder and *Fraxinus excelsior* Ash are a striking difference to the Oak canopy of the woodland to the south. *Acer pseudoplatanus* is present in the canopy at low levels and occurring more frequently as saplings within the shrub layer. *Prunus spinosa* Blackthorn replaces *Crataegus monogyna*, and *Viburnum opulus* Guelder Rose and *Salix cinerea* Grey Willow are both restricted to this community within the woodland. The ground flora in this community provides more interest than the W10 types in Spring Coppice with *Lysimachia nemorum* Yellow Pimpernel and *Stellaria neglecta* Greater Chickweed, *Mercurialis perennis* Dog's Mercury, *Circaea lutetiana* Enchanter's Nightshade and *Ajuga reptans* Bugle occurring rarely. *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage is more closely limited to the immediate side of the



Figure 2. Typical *Quercus* spp.-*Betula* spp.-*Deschampsia flexuosa* acidic ground flora composed of Wavy Hair-grass, Heath Wood-rush, Hairy Wood-rush, Heath Bedstraw and Wood Sage.



Figure 3. Typical *Alnus glutinosa*-*Fraxinus excelsior*-*Lysimachia nemorum* woodland ground flora with Dog's Mercury, Enchanter's Nightshade, Ash seedlings and Yellow Archangel

spring along with *Angelica sylvestris* Angelica and *Scrophularia nodosa* Common Figwort.

Historic management of Spring Coppice

By the time of the Domesday Book much of the forest over Britain had been fragmented into scattered woods among farmland: when the earliest detailed documents appear, woodland had scarcity value. Woods varied in size from a half a hectare to about a hundred and twenty hectares and were privately owned and sharply defined (often by banks and ditches). Nearly all were intensively managed as a coppice-with-standards system. The majority of the trees and shrubs (the *coppice*) were cut at intervals of 3 to 20 years and allowed to grow again from the stump; other trees (*standards*) were left standing for longer periods, forming an upper storey in the wood and producing larger timber. Trees of a third type, *pollards*, repeatedly cut like coppice but at two to four metres above ground to prevent the regrowth from being eaten by deer or livestock, are characteristic of non-woodland sites and wood boundaries (Rackham, 1967).

Managing native woodlands by allowing natural regeneration to occur, normally without artificial replanting (stocking), did not destroy the woodland. Woods were fenced to protect the new growth from grazing animals. They might occasionally be converted to arable (or vice versa) but woods, even small ones, are remarkably stable features in the landscape.

This traditional system of woodland management is known from documents and buildings of the later Middle Ages; it was modified in various ways throughout succeeding centuries. In most woods the management system continued within living memory; but since 1945 there have been more rapid upheavals than at any comparable period in the past. At least half the woodland area has been converted to arable or forestry. Most of the remaining woods retain their historical continuity but are no longer managed.

A typical wood contained a continuous range of sizes of standard trees from about 45 cm basal diameter downwards. They were mainly Oak, up to 70 years old, and chiefly of the smaller sizes. The

underwood, among which they grew, suppressed the branches up to about 6 metres high and allowed them to form a crown above this height. They were managed on an irregular selection system in which demand rather than supply appears to have been the dominant factor (Rackham, 1971).

In lowland England the growing of Oak has most often been a by-product of some other activity. Wood normally yielded two products: wood or underwood mainly from coppice, and timber from the standard trees. Underwood - poles used for fuel and many other purposes - was the main and a regular product: the long-lived coppice stools and a variety of species surviving from the prehistoric forest ensured the woods historical continuity.

Oak coppices freely when cut up to 150 years' growth. The resulting shoots grow quickly, up to two metres in height, in the first season, and are much less vulnerable than Oak seedlings to damage by animals and to competition from underwood and herbaceous vegetation. Many of the existing Oaks in Spring Coppice have the remains of a stump at the base or, if they were felled, they would share the very wide first annual ring characteristic of a coppice origin. Mediaeval Oak timbers, likewise, often have a curved butt with a wide first annual ring.

Early felling encouraged growth from the stump, making regeneration certain and rapid. It gave the flexibility needed to cope with the sudden demands of major building works; and avoided the problems, such as heart rots caused by *Laetiporus sulphureus* Sulphur Polypore, coming up from the stool or *Stereum gausapatum* Bleeding Oak Crust, getting in through dead branches, which often develop if woodland Oak stands beyond 100 years. The system was remarkably stable and efficient method of producing structural timber: it produced a sustained yield, both of Oak and underwood, for at least 700 years.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, woodland Oak lost its importance as a building timber owing to increasing imports of foreign oak and other timbers, and perhaps to Oak production from plantations. The departure from this traditional management system and the loss of importance that the underwood and timber represented has gone on to create many of the problems that Spring Coppice currently faces, chief amongst these is the lack of Oak regeneration.

It has long been appreciated that Oak seldom grows from seed in existing woods (Watt, 1919), though it does so freely, outside woodland, if protected from grazing. This appears to be a problem within the last 100 years: there is no suggestion that in former centuries any difficulty was found in replacing woodland Oaks. The most likely cause of this lack of natural regeneration is likely to be a form of *Erysiphe alphitoides* Oak mildew (Bert *et al.*, 2016) that originated remarkably in a tropical region on *Mangifera indica* Mango (Lonsdale, 2015).

Oak Mildew has long been known to have particularly severe effects on seedlings and saplings. Their shoots continue to develop over a relatively long part of the growing season and thus remain highly susceptible to infection throughout the peak periods of mildew spore deposition. The resulting heavy colonisation by mildew leads to stunting, distortion and sometimes death of the affected shoots. On older trees, this kind of damage is usually confined to shoots that form during a final flush of late summer growth or that develop in response to pruning, coppicing or insect defoliation.

The location and diameter of all Oak saplings throughout Spring Coppice was recorded; the locations are displayed in figure 4.

The circumference of 153 saplings was recorded and the diameter calculated from this data. The average diameter was 6.8 cm; the range of diameter was from 1.3-19.8 cm; and the median was 6.4 cm, indicating that many of the saplings are near the average size and not many skewed the data. Those saplings with a larger girth are shorter trees with a more open canopy because they are grown in the open.

It is clear from the data displayed in figure 4 that Oak is naturally regenerating in areas which are exposed to the prevailing wind which comes from the south-west. This is what has been observed from the 'switch' that Oak made from germinating and growing within Oak woodlands to growing in the open by necessity. The mechanism by which Oak Mildew is overcoming the Oak's defence is weakened in open areas, presumably this relates to the amount of time moisture sits on the foliage, providing an opportunity for the fungus to move around the leaf surface, grow and develop.

This is leading to a situation where Oak is failing



Figure 4. Displaying the location of Oak saplings within Spring Coppice in May 2022.

to naturally regenerate within the centre and northern section of Spring Coppice.

Within Oak woodlands throughout Britain, Oak seedlings are failing, and consequently there is a lack of recruitment of Oak saplings which, in time, will lead to a loss of canopy replacements.

Sampling in two compartments indicate that canopy replacements, in order of abundance, will be *Sorbus aucuparia*, *Acer pseudoplatanus* and *Ilex aquifolium* in the northwest section of Spring Coppice, and *Prunus avium*, *Sorbus aucuparia* and *Ilex aquifolium* throughout the rest of the woodland.

This is a significant change within the history of the woodland. These species support different organisms and have different characteristics. Table 1 shows the difference in height within the canopy and their potential longevity:

Table 1. The potential longevity and height within the canopy of tree species within Spring Coppice. Source: Woodland Trust.

Species	Longevity (years)	Height (m)
Holly	300	15
Rowan	200	15
Wild Cherry	60	30
Sycamore	400	35
Oak	500 (coppiced trees may reach 1000)	20-40

Many of the mature Oak trees are approximately 110 years old and showing signs that, unless they are managed through coppicing, they will reach the end of their lives within the next few decades.

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The Large-leaved Lime trees of Wenlock Edge

John Tuer

Of the two lime tree species native to the British Isles, *Tilia cordata*, Small-leaved Lime is the more common. The rarer of the two, the *Tilia platyphyllos*, Large-leaved Lime is to be found only in certain areas. In these areas some of the limes derive from those that arrived in Britain towards the end of the last Ice Age and before the melt-waters of the ice formed the English Channel, as all other 'native-to-Britain' tree species, while other specimens of *Tilia platyphyllos* have since been brought into the country by man.

This discussion concerns solely *Tilia platyphyllos* because, although rarer, Shropshire does have one of the areas where large concentrations of this species can be found. By looking at their distribution here in more depth, there is an attempt to discover whether they are trees arising from those original specimens arriving after the Ice Age or whether they have been imported and planted since.

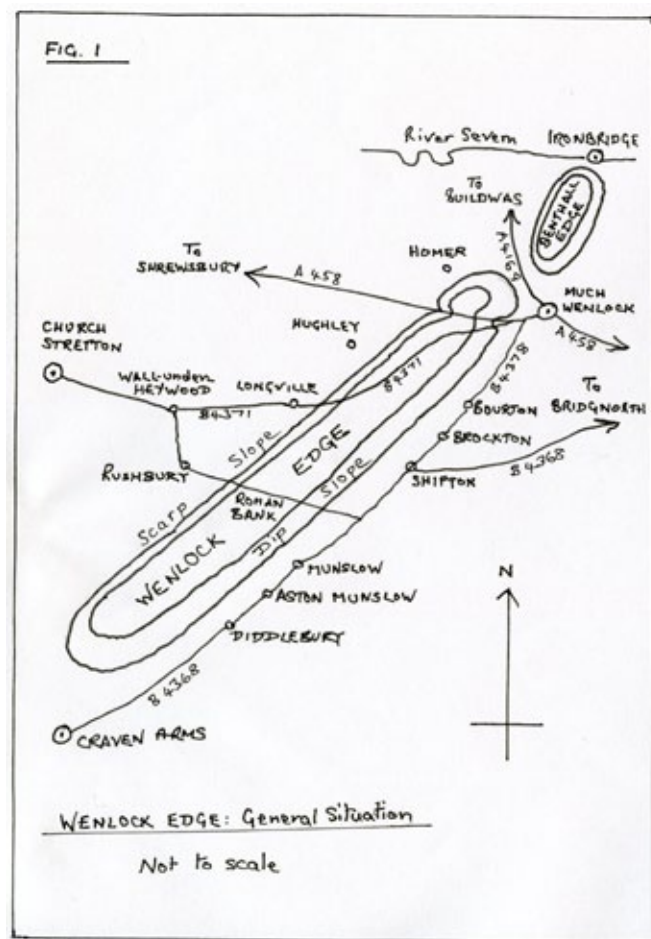
Asked by Donald Pigott, the authority on lime trees and author of the monograph 'Lime-trees and Basswoods' (1), the current writer has spent much time over the past ten years attempting to answer the above question. The area under discussion is Wenlock Edge and this writer has walked from end to end along major and minor footpaths in an attempt to completely cover the Edge to discover all of the Large-leaved Limes that exist there.

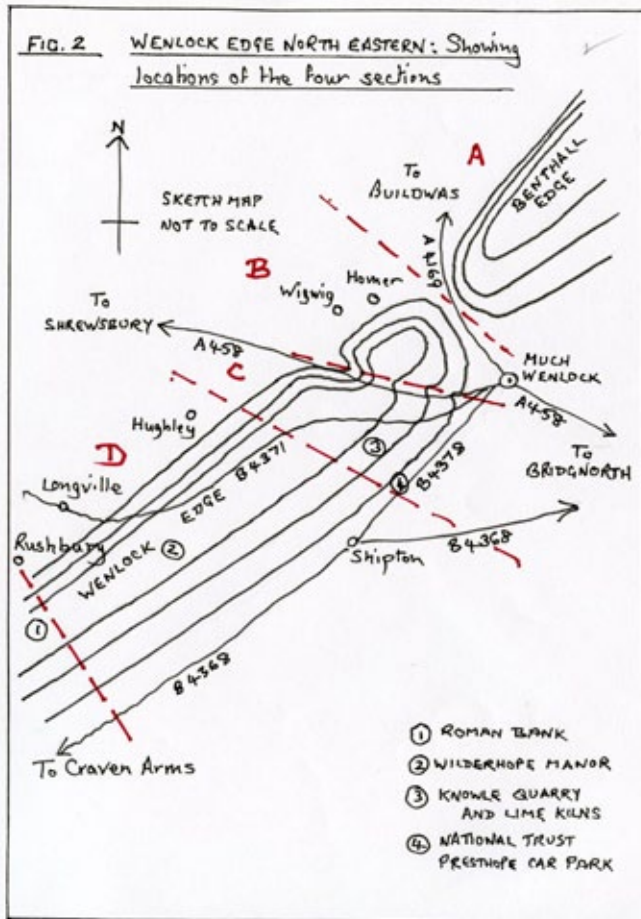
One of the most outstanding findings of this research was that, in passing along the Edge from Benthall Edge in the north east to Craven Arms in the south west, *Tilia platyphyllos* was not to be found anywhere south west of Roman Bank above Rushbury (Grid Ref. SO519909. See Fig. 1). It just seemed, very strangely, as if there was some kind of barrier against this species at Roman Bank.

At this point, this author, following his researches, found that he could divide the length of the Edge where *Tilia platyphyllos* can be found into four sections (See Fig. 2): Section A is the whole of Benthall Edge to the A4169 road from Much Wenlock to Buildwas; Section B is that part of Wenlock Edge above Wigwig and Homer between the A4169 and the Much Wenlock to Shrewsbury road, the A458; Section C extends from the A458 to just beyond the National Trust Car Park at Presthope, and Section D is from here to Roman Bank.

Another very important finding was that all specimens of *Tilia platyphyllos* found in Sections B and D were in straight lines. It is most unlikely that trees that have self-regenerated would grow in straight lines so it is possible that these have been planted.

In Sections A and C, there are Large-leaved Limes of different ages from very young newly emerged seedlings to well-established specimens. John Handley, who wrote a paper on this species of lime tree in Section A (those on Benthall Edge) for the Shropshire Botanical Society (2), kindly took Andrew Allott and myself to look at these trees. If there had ever been any planting in straight lines, these would have been obliterated years ago because these are the areas – both Section A and





Section C - that have been extensively quarried and/or used for charcoal burning.

So if we focus our attention on Sections B and D, we not only find the specimens of *Tilia platyphyllos* to be sited in a line along the top of the Edge, but also along the many hollow ways leading down the scarp face of the Edge, with some appearing from time to time near the foot of this steep slope. Working north eastwards from Roman Bank, a broken line of specimens extends along the crest of the Edge to just beyond and above Wilderhope Manor. There are eighteen specimens here. Above Homer and Wigwig in Section B, there are another fourteen specimens along the same alignment. These have all been regularly coppiced over the years and show signs of past pleaching showing the likelihood that they had once formed part of a hedge.

The lines of *Tilia platyphyllos* specimens leading down the hollow ways are, in each hollow way only on one side, sometimes the 'up-hill side', sometimes the other. They, too, have been coppiced but not pleached. In the five hollow ways where these are a significant feature there is a total of 28 specimens, all in Section D. All except four have been coppiced; the remaining four having been

pollarded. In Section B, there are no hollow ways although there are more specimens near the foot of the Edge here which might have been boundary markers. There are ten of these. In Section D, at the foot of the Edge there are two old pollarded specimens which show all the characteristics of ancient trees.

In the hollow way in Section D, leading down from the National Trust car park at Presthope, are two of the pollarded hollow way specimens. One was undercut by heavy rainfall in the spring of 2019 when the hollow way became a fast-flowing stream and the tree collapsed across this ancient pathway.

One must ask again whether there is any evidence of these trees in lines in Sections A and C, replicating those in Sections B and D, because this writer returned again to these areas searching for such evidence and, remarkably, found one such tree on Benthall Edge early in 2022. This was an unexpected and helpful find, discovered completely by accident, and is a specimen of *Tilia platyphyllos* that has been coppiced and pleached. Although no others appear in the vicinity, this single specimen does seem to prove that there had been another line of limes along the top of the Edge here. Why else would it have been pleached? In addition, this particular specimen sat where one of the first quarries had been cut into Benthall Edge, right up to its base, suggesting that the planting of the tree pre-dated the quarry. We do know that from about 1220 Buildwas Abbey was allowed to quarry limestone here to extend its buildings (3).

So why are there no limes in Sections B and D other than those in lines? Why haven't they distributed their seed and generated new saplings in these two areas? It is known that it requires a hot summer for *Tilia platyphyllos* to produce viable seed. It is only in a hot summer that the pollen can grow its tubes long enough to reach down the styles of the ovaries, and most summers in Britain in recent history have not been hot enough to allow for this. In France, for example, with its hot summers, *Tilia platyphyllos* seed germinates readily. Andrew Allott and I were to prove this in 2018 when we collected very many seeds from the Wenlock Edge limes following a very hot summer in that year. Andrew has had considerable success with these seeds adding strength to the statement above (4).

So what about those hot summers in the past when



One of the coppiced and pleached lime trees in Coates Wood along the top of Wenlock Edge, probably part of an original hedge. John Tuer



Pollarded lime in the hollow way below the National Trust Car Park at Presthope. John Tuer

pollen tubes did grow long enough for fertilisation to take place? In Sections A and C, success is more likely to be seen because of a lack of interference in these areas since the quarrying and, hence, we see trees of different ages. Is the lack of regeneration in Sections B and D the result of browsing by deer? It is a difficult question to answer.

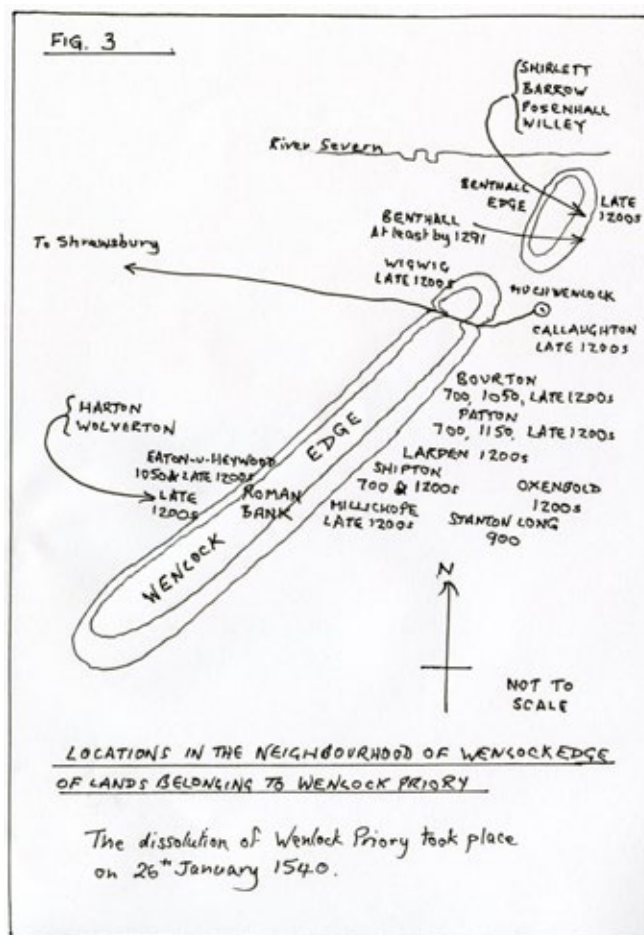
So if we may assume correctly that these specimens of *Tilia platyphyllos* in Sections B and D and the one specimen in Section A were actually planted, we must ask the question “by whom?” To establish this without any doubt, we would really need to cut down a tree to count its annual rings, something that is not desirable even for research purposes. Donald Pigott has collected information for many specimens of this species with known dates of planting and diameters at breast height (dbh) (5). However, these are all of maiden trees, not of those coppiced or pollarded. So being unable to use empirical evidence, we must look at their environment and consider circumstantial evidence.

We must ask the questions: if these trees were not planted in recent years, which is most unlikely because all landowners on which the trees stand would have to have had the same idea at the same time to plant them as discovered above, then who might have organised their planting over the whole of the Edge from Ironbridge to Roman Bank? For what purpose would they have planted the trees in this way, and were these trees planted using local seed or imported plants?

This writer can only give some tentative answers to these questions or, as the saying goes “the absence of evidence does not provide evidence of absence”! So what follows is not sufficient evidence but it’s still plausible.

Wenlock Priory owned all the land from Ironbridge to Roman Bank, and a little beyond, from the late 1200s until its dissolution in 1540 (see Fig. 3) (6) and there are, repeatedly, no Large-leaved Lime trees beyond Roman Bank. We also know that monastic properties were keen to plant *Tilia platyphyllos* specimens near their sites because examples are also found to this day at Buildwas Priory and other priories and abbeys in the country.

They were planted for several reasons. Just beneath the bark lies the “bast”, the fibrous component of secondary phloem made up of softer and coarser layers or, depending on the ages of the trees, softer



in younger trees, coarser in older specimens (7). The bast of lime trees was known to have superior strength and could be used for rope-making, fishing nets, rope ladders, sandal making and other uses. A rope used to haul a bucket of water from a well needed to be particularly strong. Sandals, made from both coarse and soft bast, would have a limited life and it is suggested that the monks would wear through several pairs in one year. At its height, Wenlock Priory had forty monks in residence (8).

In the absence of sugar as a sweetener, honey would have been used, with bees required to produce it. Here also would be a source of wax for candles. The nectar from limes would provide a more than suitable raw material for these monastic necessities. To this day, there are bee hives owned by the residents of the old abbots’ lodging at Buildwas and these stand not far from the regularly flowering specimens of *Tilia platyphyllos* on site.

So if the aforementioned Limes were, indeed, planted by Wenlock Priory, why would they plant them in these situations? Again, what follows are tentative answers. Maybe, planting just beyond Roman Bank was a little too far for regular collection of their produce. The limes along the

top of the Edge, as already suggested, would have formed a hedge, maybe to keep animals out of the wood. Also, as suggested, the trees near the foot of the Edge could have been planted as boundary markers.

More difficult to explain are the reasons for planting the hollow way limes as they did (if they did). This writer will make a suggestion. We know that the hollow ways were regularly used by people crossing the Edge for centuries, mainly on foot, sometimes with their animals. It was necessary to keep them passable. We also know what happens during torrential rainfall from what we saw of the collapse of one of these trees in spring 2019. Could it be that besides planting for their produce, the monks used this species to stabilise the most vulnerable side of a hollow way?

Coppiced and pollarded limes take some years before their new stems flower again. It is possible that the trees were placed on a rota, some being coppiced for obtaining bast, others left alone for nectar, reversing the process when the coppiced trees had grown enough to flower again. There is still the difficulty of answering the question of why some of the trees were pollarded.

Then, what about the problem of germinating enough trees for planting in all these locations? We know that Wenlock Priory was a Cluniac Priory for much of its existence, its “mother” house being in Burgundy, France. We know, too, that Wenlock monks had to make visits to Cluny at least once annually (9). It is possible that they returned with supplies of lime tree saplings.

We could measure some of the stools of these coppiced limes which would have to be done at their bases to be able to count the annual rings accurately. Very little research has been undertaken on the dating of coppiced trees, but Ian Rotherham has taken down coppiced trees in Sheffield with a known planting date and found that a ring count at their bases does in fact give an accurate date of planting (10). A rough throwing of a measuring tape around some of the bases of the Wenlock Edge limes shows them to have an extremely large girth but in the absence of figures we can still only make the kinds of guesses that have been made above. But wouldn't it be a find if we could say that these trees had actually been planted by the monks of Wenlock Abbey?

Since writing this, sadly Professor Donald Pigott passed away on 11th September, aged 94 years. This piece is now written to his memory. JT.

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Botanists wanted!

Penny Wysome

Shropshire Wildlife Trust is responsible for a large number of reserves which contain very varied habitats. Management of these is a complex task, and over the years various ways of informing the Trustees of the condition of the sites have been utilised. Such condition assessments enable resources to be allocated effectively and provide priorities for the Reserve Managers.

Until 2018 the Trust employed a botanist, Fiona Gomersall, who was responsible for gathering the botanical data needed to inform the conservation work. Reserves were visited in rotation over the years covering woodlands, grasslands, mires and heaths. Once a year a summary was presented to the Trustees and the Reserve Managers, and programmes of work drawn up and implemented based on Fiona's reports. Over this time period Fiona recruited and trained a team of volunteers (myself included) who gradually acquired skills in identification and data handling, and as she got busier with other tasks, began to work more independently to maintain a flow of information. When she moved on, our team was asked if we would take on the task of monitoring the reserves.

The current team of eight has accepted this challenge though we are well aware that we are not professional botanists. As a group we do have skills in identification, data handling, conservation management and ecology, and a combined experience of monitoring the same reserves over more than a decade, but we are not professionals. Shropshire Wildlife Trust is currently seeking new volunteers for a number of tasks, including botanical monitoring. We have been asked to draw up what amounts to a job description because we are conscious that we do not have the time – or possibly even the skills, to train people from scratch. We have to work fast across our sites to collect the data and we have found from experience that explaining every step and identifying every plant slows us down. There is an element of guilt about this as we learnt by going out with Fiona who patiently oversaw our progress, though some of us did do a number of courses, Biological Recording

Certificate for example, to try and improve our identification skills.

It is very possible that existing members of the Shropshire Botanical Society far exceed these requirements and would be ideal members of our team. The Trust website has the full description if anyone is interested, but these are the qualities we have identified. We hope that this does not feel too demanding.

- Familiarity with at least 12 of the main botanical families
- Enthusiasm to improve plant species identification skills
- Ability to use plant species identification keys
- Teamwork skills
- Willingness to learn and use scientific names of plant species
- Experience recording and inputting data
- Driving licence and access to a vehicle

Some level of commitment is also needed; we go out weekly between May and September in all weathers and on varied terrain. None of us manages every week, but with a bigger team we will always be quorate.

Potential site monitors not quite ready to join us might well benefit from the Identiplant training that Sue Dancey is supporting from within the SBS. This is a one year online course in identification designed to introduce the main plant families. There is a fee for the course and learners are allocated a local tutor to support them with the modules.

The Shropshire Wildlife Trust website has the full role description and application forms to become a volunteer. <https://www.shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/volunteer>

Lyth Hill – Andrew Perry

On the 1st May we assembled at the top of Lyth Hill ready to explore some spring ephemerals. We did not have far to go as the rock outcrop just below the carpark (at SJ 472 068) delivered plenty! We explored this area on hands and knees for some time admiring the diminutive flora which included *Moenchia erecta* Upright Chickweed, *Plantago coronopus* Buck's-horn Plantain and *Spergularia rubra* Sand Spurrey. We found much more acid grassland (U1 in the National Vegetation Classification) around many of the rock outcrops on the hill where the soils are thinner.

Woodland plants made a fine display in Spring Coppice on the west of the hill (which is described in detail in John Handley's article in this issue). After this we descended the bank to the south where the grassland has frequent *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* Bluebell, and followed the boardwalk eastwards across a marshy area before climbing back up to the carpark. The variety of habitats produced a good list of over 150 species, and thankfully our new VCRs were in attendance to do the recording!



Plantago coronopus Buck's-horn Plantain flowering on Lyth Hill. Andrew Perry.

Secret Hills Discovery Centre – Mags Cousins

There were plenty of new faces this year especially at the Secret Hills Discovery Centre (SHDC) which was advertised to the volunteers and visitors to the centre. The meeting at SHDC, Craven Arms in May, was partly to continue the site species list started last year, which as a result of the two Bot Soc field meetings, has now passed 200 species in total. This will act as a baseline for the centre manager to monitor their progress in restoring biodiversity at the site which 20 years ago was a typical hard-grazed Shropshire sheep farm. The other purpose of the outing was to introduce the wild plants to the visitors and volunteers, who were largely novices, although not without their own plant skills. One of the ladies was a Royal Horticultural Society flower judge and was hoping or expecting to see large and showy flowers! Any hardened botanists looking for spring ephemerals will know why the exclamation mark. However, by the end of the morning observing us on our hands and knees looking at tiny plants, this horticulturist was actually quite fascinated by the small, tough little species that were related to her showstoppers. *Geranium pusillum* Small-flowered Crane's-bill and *Cerastium diffusum* Sea Mouse-ear, were putting on their own diminutive show on an already parched area of hard core and gravel. Willingness to engage with grasses and sedges was more variable amongst



Geranium pusillum Small-flowered Crane's-bill and *Cerastium diffusum* Sea Mouse-ear at Secret Hills Discovery Centre, Craven Arms. Mags Cousins.

the group, but we found a few large ones to impress and inspect their determining features, such as *Carex riparia* Greater Pond-sedge and *Carex pendula* Pendulous Sedge. Six different sedges have now been recorded at the site.

Llanymynech Rocks – Mags Cousins

For the field meeting to Llanymynech Rocks Shropshire Wildlife Trust reserve at the beginning of June, I think we can all admit that we wanted to see how the limestone flowers and orchids in particular were doing. We didn't find any *Gymnadenia conopsea* Fragrant Orchid, but pleasingly there were several *Ophrys apifera* Bee Orchids, *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* Common Spotted-orchid, *Orchis mascula* Early-purple Orchid, *Anacamptis pyramidalis* Pyramidal Orchid, *Platanthera chlorantha* Greater Butterfly-orchid and *Neottia cordata* Common Twayblade on show, with a supporting cast of *Blackstonia perfoliata* Yellow-wort, *Agrimonia eupatoria* Agrimony, *Carlina vulgaris* Carline Thistle, and so many more species of limestone.

Melverley Meadows – Penny Wysome

A select group of six botanists visited Molverley Meadows on a rather grey day which threatened rain but did not fortunately deliver. The site comprises a large mosaic of interconnecting meadows, some of which are wetter than others. The primary purpose was to enjoy walking through the fields which have very high ratios of herb-to-grass (70–80% flowers), and are spectacular to look at. On close examination there are not a very high number of species, but there are large numbers of a few species. These include abundant orchids, mainly *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* Common Spotted Orchid but also *D. maculata* Heath Spotted Orchid. Other species include *Centaurea nigra* Common Knapweed, *Euphrasia officinalis* Eyebright, *Lotus corniculatus* Common Bird's-foot Trefoil, *Succisa pratensis* Devil's-bit Scabious, and large amounts of *Rhinanthus minor* Yellow Rattle and *Hypochaeris radicata* Common Cat's Ear.

In a couple of wetter fields there are good quantities of *Silene flos-cuculi* Ragged Robin, sometimes accompanied by *Caltha palustris* Marsh Marigold and *Juncus articulatus* Jointed Rush.

When the condition had been assessed in 2021 for Shropshire Wildlife Trust, the monitoring group

had tried to find a pattern for the distribution of plants in the main drier fields, and Eric Steer, who was with the visiting group, had suggested that in some fields the ridge and furrow cultivation in the past had left undulations which were wetter in the hollows than on the ridges so favouring different species. This did seem to be the case and the group discussed the hypothesis as they wandered through these lovely meadows.

The secondary purpose of the visit was to see if the rare Spiny Restharrow *Ononis spinosa* was surviving. Several plants were found; they inhabit a ditch near a hedge between two fields and they are holding their own, albeit not increasing as they are surrounded by vigorous plants like Hogweed.

It is definitely worth visiting this meadow to see the profusion of flowers.

Stevenshill, Cound – Dan Wrench

A small group of six gathered at Cound Church on 26th of June to work our way up the Coundmoor Brook to get to Stevenshill. Stevenshill, in the 1km square SJ5503, is a well recorded site, so this visit was really a chance for members to get to see, and provide updated records, of some of the species of interest found there. The key plants we were looking for were *Draba muralis* Wall Whitlowgrass, *Atropa belladonna* Deadly Nightshade, *Dipsacus pilosus* Small Teasel and *Saxifraga granulata* Meadow Saxifrage.

Atropa belladonna was the first one spotted with several plants ground along the woodland edge, both above and on a stone wall. It was late in the season for *Draba muralis* but the keen-eyed John Clayfield managed to spot a few dried up seed-heads on the same stone wall that *A. belladonna* was growing on. Trees and shrubs were shading much of the wall which was a concern for a species that favours bright conditions.

Dipsacus pilosus was dotted about in the valley but not as frequently as previously seen – although the height of the vegetation may have hindered views.

We did manage to just about find the Meadow Saxifrage but literally only a few leaves on the dry bank just past the gate out of the woodland to the south.

New finds for the site were very few but Martin Godfrey spotted *Dryopteris* × *complexa* -the hybrid between *Dryopteris filix-mas* Male Fern and *D.*

affinis Scaly Male-fern. The full list of new species is presented below:

- *Alnus cordata* Italian Alder
- *Carduus crispus* Watted Thistle
- *Chaerophyllum temulum* Rough Chervil
- × *Cuprocyparis leylandii* Leyland Cypress
- *Dryopteris* × *complexa* (*D. filix-mas* × *D. affinis*)
- *Lotus corniculatus* Common Bird's-foot-trefoil
- *Melissa officinalis* Balm
- *Odontites vernus* Red Bartsia



For the full list of species previously recorded at this site visit the new SBS database. This QR code will take you right there:

Thanks to those who came along and helped record, and also to John Hall for permission to stray off the public footpath.



Atropa belladonna Deadly Nightshade at Stevenshill.
Dan Wrench.

Cudwell Meadow – Andrew Perry

Following an article by Mike Carter on this site in our spring 2021 newsletter, we arranged a field visit in July 2022 to explore Cudwell Meadow and some of the adjacent 'Stretton Wetland' area. Mike kindly led us around the site and explained some of the history and current management. There were a range of habitats from dry grassland to marsh and inundation vegetation, with frequent *Eleocharis palustris* Common Spike-rush, *Ranunculus flammula* Lesser Spearwort, *Galium palustre* Marsh Bedstraw and *Lotus pedunculatus* Greater Bird's-foot trefoil. *Persicaria* were also well represented with *P. amphibia* Amphibious Bistort, *P. hydropiper* Water Pepper, *P. lapathifolia* Pale Persicaria and *P. maculosa* Redshank all present.

After lunch, Mike took us to some of the other land within the Stretton Wetlands for which he had secured permission from the landowners. These fields have not been actively managed for many years and have developed a dense cover of tall herbs including *Oenanthe crocata* Hemlock Water-dropwort *Iris pseudacorus* Yellow Iris and *Filipendula ulmaria* Meadowsweet, along with scattered *Salix* willows. A pleasant surprise was *Scutellaria galericulata* Skullcap which we found in a few locations, and *Lychnis flos-cuculi* Ragged Robin was also present. Much of this area is now designated Local Wildlife Site and it supports a variety of birds, invertebrates, amphibians and notably *Arvicola amphibius* Water Vole.



Surveying the Stretton Wetlands, Church Stretton. Andrew Perry.



Scutellaria galericulata Skullcap in the Stretton Wetlands.
Andrew Perry.

Nover's Hill, Long Mynd - Mags Cousins

The Nover's Hill wetland was well and truly dried out by the time of the joint meeting with the Wild Flower Society at the beginning of August, but actually yielded quite a number of the target species. The drying muddy edges of the wetland and even just a large dried puddle on the track had provided the drawdown zone where plants such as *Littorella uniflora* Shoreweed are able to germinate rapidly and take advantage of low competition. The group were also treated to *Hypericum elodes* Marsh St. John's-wort, *Lythrum portula* Water Purslane and *Eleogiton fluitans* Floating Club-rush which were persisting, although not thriving in the dry conditions. As the group were also starting to flag in the heat we descended back to the cars and drove up to Wild Moor Pool for a relaxing lunch beside the pool accompanied by dragonflies and damselflies. Searching the flushes above the pool after lunch, we found a different selection of flush specialists such as *Montia fontana* Blinks, *Lysimachia tenella* Bog Pimpernel and *Carex dioica* Dioecious Sedge with the eagle eyed in the group spotting both the male and female plants.



Littorella uniflora Shoreweed and *Lythrum portula* Water Purslane in a dried up puddle, Nover's Hill, Long Mynd.
Mags Cousins.

Obituary – Chris Walker

Sue Dancey

In late May, like many of us, I was very sad to learn of the death of Chris Walker. I offer these few words in his memory.

I met Chris in the 1990s when pulling together course tutors for the botanical courses and went out with him as driver and learner for several courses - including the one illustrated where he taught me a great deal about the field identification of sedges. It was then I realised that he was an absolute star. Not only was he skilled at spotting and identifying his plants, he had a love of wetlands up to the point that he often swam in them as he was a keen practitioner of wild swimming. He also demonstrated an amazing knowledge of our county and was a skilled teacher into the bargain. He came to my attention through his work at Natural England and had been at Attingham Park through its two previous identities as English Nature and

the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC). He had choice things to say about all three which I will not repeat here, suffice to say that bureaucracy was not his first love! He loved his fieldwork and the wild sites he was often sent to survey and did his utmost to help us all understand them better.

After his retirement he led more courses for many organisations and he used his retirement to do more of the many things that he loved. He was kind enough to lead and write for our Society. You only have to go back a little way to read his fab piece in our own newsletter in Autumn 2019 when he cited five reasons for the deterioration of many of the wetland sites in our county: Agricultural, intensification and removal of hedges, increase in fertility, decrease in water quality, reduction in grazing hence too much successional change and invasive plants. His arguments about these



pressures are well delivered as is his report on the visit to Wildmoor Pool as part of his volunteer role as one of the society's field leaders. He was a regular attendee at our meetings and enjoyed the fiendish quizzes set by Ruth Dawes and Mark Duffell.

Although botany was his profession, skill set and joy, it certainly did not define him. He was an active practitioner of the Alexander Technique and even led a course for us at Preston Montford, combining the posture issues with carrying rucksacks and squinting at plants and down microscopes! He was also an accomplished musician and chorister and at his wonderful funeral, members of his choral society Cantata and his folk group paid tribute to his vocal and instrumental skills, friendship and calm good humour. At his funeral, he was also remembered for his empathy and care by good friends from his Alexander groups and his conservation passion from those who worked with him. I was delighted that his wild swimming also got a mention alongside his botanical skill from NCC colleagues.

No one will have known Chris well without understanding his passion for cycling, the need for the wearing of appropriate headwear, the benefits of freshwater and looking after yourself and each other. Perhaps if you knew him through botany you might not have picked up his skill with a penny whistle, his Welsh speaking or his lovely family who shared their memories with us at his funeral. He leaves his children and grandchildren and his lovely widow Andrea bereft. I know that the SBS committee and many members offered our sincere condolences and recognise that we too have lost a friend.

In summary, we as a society owe this unassuming man a debt of gratitude. He gave freely of his expertise, was a quiet and active supporter, helped many of us to further our own understanding and learn. He was a friend and confidant to so many of us.